

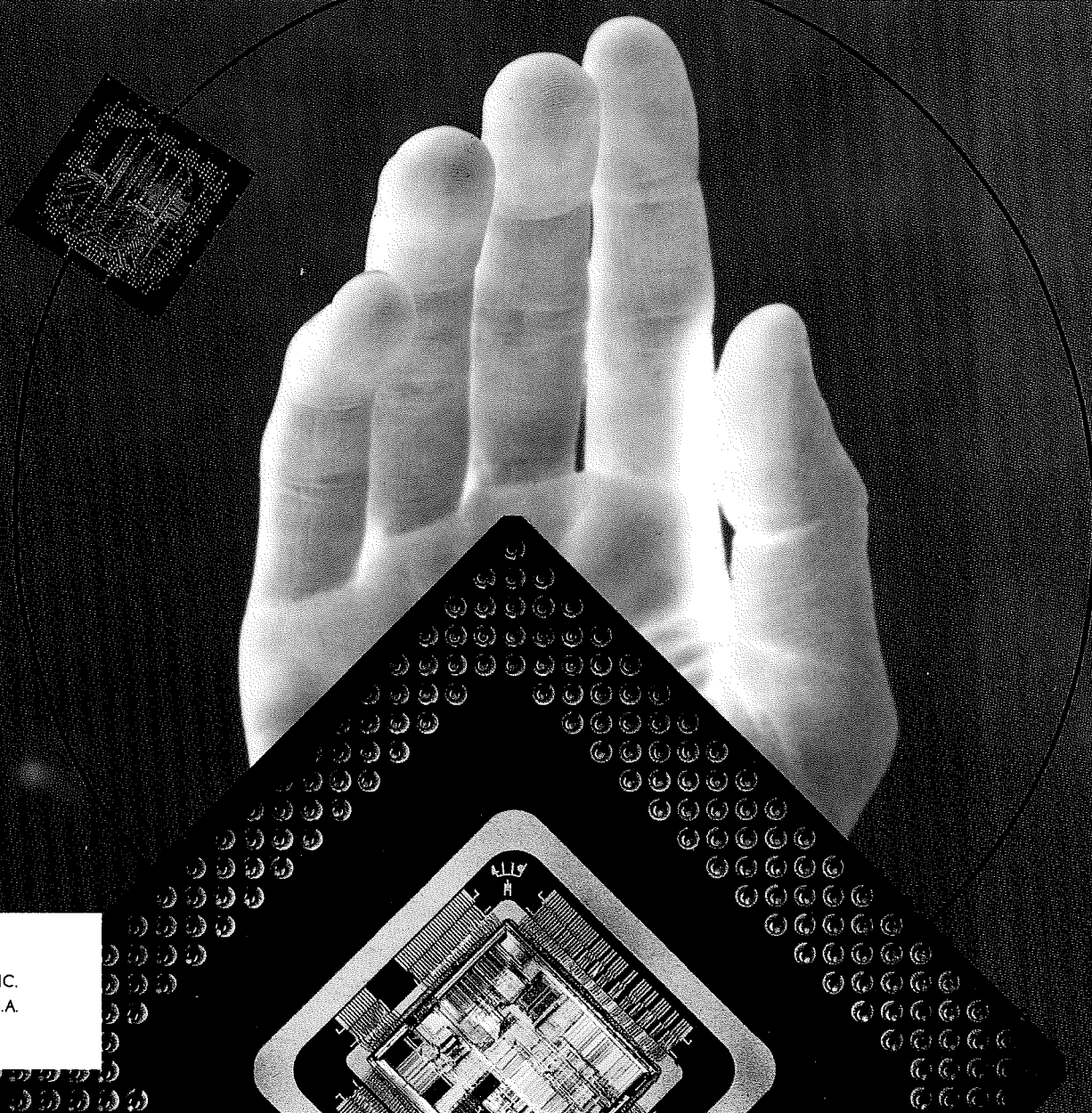
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY GUIDE — AND MORE

JULY 11, 1994

\$4.50

FORTUNE

Managing in a WIRED WORLD



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FORTUNE CHECKS OUT 25 COOL COMPANIES

FOR PRODUCTS, IDEAS, AND INVESTMENTS

Try to be cool and you're Conan O'Brien. Stop trying, and CBS pays you \$42 million to host the *Late Show*. Try to be cool, and you're 3DO. Stop trying, and you're Logitech, the company that decided computer mice weren't its thing but now ships more of them each year than mighty Microsoft. Build a better product—or tell a better joke—and the buzz can be about you.

In an info-tech age that's fast losing its innocence (will the Justice Department drag Bill Gates into court?), each company in our roundup has qualities that can get you, well, inspired.

That doesn't mean they're all big successes. Only some will conquer the universe and make you sorry you didn't invest—or couldn't, since many are privately held.

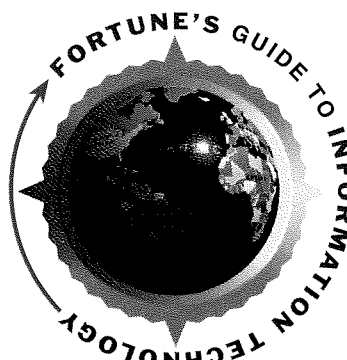
Info-tech companies don't have to be young to create amazing products, nor do their founders. The youngest executive at Infosafe Systems is 51. Elwood Norris, Geppetto-like head of Norris Communications, is 55 and has nine children.

One factor distinguishes this group from a similar list we assembled last fall: the Internet. Mosaic Communications writes software for it, McAfee Associates sells products through it, and Enterprise Integration Technologies helps others transact business on it.

The founders of Women's Wire met via the Net, a mode of introduction they refer to as "the Nineties blind date."

Like every cool company since IBM in its glory days, these show an enviable aptitude for ignoring old rules. The CEO at one outfit saw no need

for a headquarters, so didn't build one. Another company doesn't grant a set number of vacation days, telling employees to take time off when they get tired. A third asks customers to pay for software on the honor system and isn't particularly bothered if they don't. Cool companies, like cool people, don't waste time looking over their shoulder to see what the other guy is doing. ■ by Stephanie Losee





MOSAIC COMMUNICATIONS (founded 1994)

Software for commerce on the Internet
Mountain View, California

Sales: none

Employees: 18

■ **The Guru With the Cash:** You're Jim Clark, 50, Silicon Valley Legend. You've just left Silicon Graphics, the company that brought 3-D computer graphics to workstations and to Hollywood. You're walking away with about \$37 million in stock, not to mention any other money you've made in the dozen years since you founded the company. What to do? You've got a great yacht—why not head off to Fiji again?

Your old company is now making video servers and designing set-top boxes for corporate tests of interactive TV. But you think the real action lies on the Internet, which links 20 million people around the world and is growing, by some estimates, at a rate of 20% a month. You say, "Before the first 100,000 users have broadband-switched television services, there's going to be a multibillion-dollar commerce on the Internet."

And you know how to start companies. Just hire a team of smart kids from a hot computing university like Stanford or the University of Illinois. After all, that's how you founded Silicon Graphics.

The Hayseed With the Know-How: You're Marc Andreessen, 9 years old, a smart kid in New Lisbon, Wisconsin (pop. 1,450). You're bored. So you go to the library, check out computer books, and teach yourself how to write Basic, the programming language. This is before you've touched a computer. When

you do get your hands on one, you write a math program that very day.

When high school's finally done, you get out of New Lisbon and make for the University of Illinois, home of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA). You put together a team and create Mosaic, a software program to help people navigate the Internet via hypertext links connecting information-rich computers around the world. In March 1993, you offer Mosaic on the Internet free. A year later, more than a million people are using it.

Now you're 22. Enterprise Integration Technologies, a Palo Alto company interested in developing commercial applications of Mosaic, pays you big bucks, so you head west. A couple of weeks after you arrive, Jim Clark, *the* Jim Clark, sends you E-mail. He offers you a trip on his yacht. He offers you a job. You struggle with the decision for over a month. Your employer lays a guilt trip on you. You agonize, you play Hamlet. But, as that employer now acknowledges, "When you're 22, and Jim Clark calls and wants you to found a company with him, you do it." So you move to Jim's new office in Mountain View. You recruit your university pals. Now you're ready to make real cash.

The Investor With Questions: Reading this story, you wonder, "How can I get a piece of this?" Because you know that Silicon Graphics has returned 33.6% annually since going public in 1986; that Mosaic is the hottest software on the Internet; that employees at companies like General Electric and J.P. Morgan are already using it; that commerce on the Internet may indeed grow as quickly as Jim Clark thinks it will.

Working at a Jim Clark startup has a way of cheering people up: Mosaic's Chris Houck, Aleks Totic, Marc Andreessen, Jon Mittelhauser, Clark, Lou Montulli, and Rob McCool.

The problem is that this time, Jim's not the only one with the bright idea of creating and supporting Mosaic-based products for business use. At least eight companies have licensed Mosaic from NCSA for commercial development (see the following story for one). And some may offer products before Mosaic Communications does.

So the field's wide open. But are you going to bet against Jim Clark? **—Rick Tetzeli**

